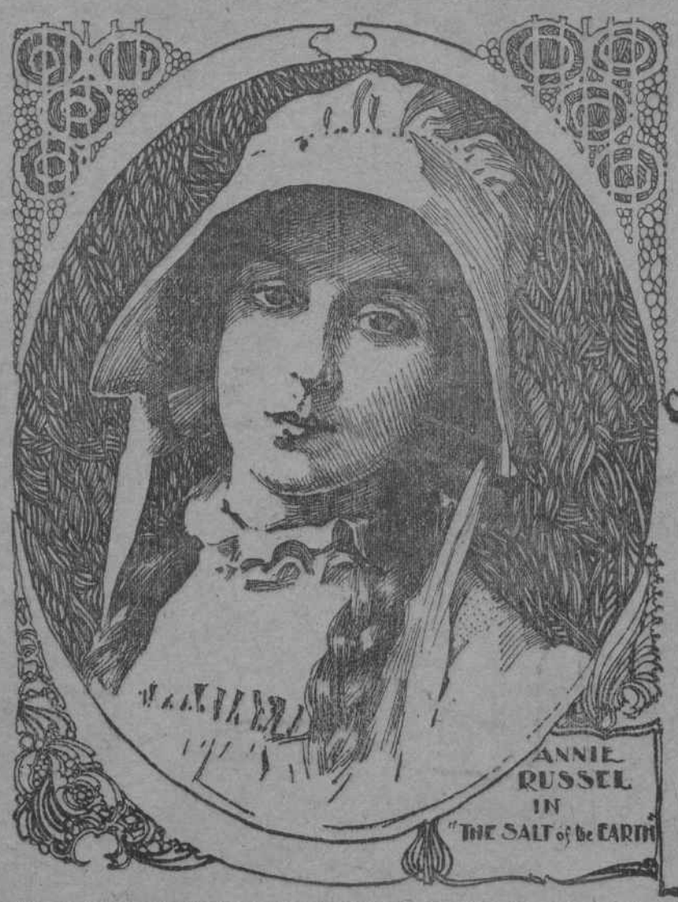
AN INTERESTING CHAT WITH THE "AMERICAN DUSE," MISS ANNIE RUSSELL.

She Tells the Journal of Her London Success in "Dangerfield" and Her Impressions of an English Audience.



"IT is impossible for me to describe, and nobody can imagine, how badly I felt on my opening night in London," said Miss Annie Russell, the American actress, who is just back from the British metropolis with a batch of laurels.

"The Duse of the English stage," the critics christened this clever young woman, who went to them unheralded and comparatively unknown.

"One day last May," said Miss Russell, going back to the beginning of this most interesting chapter in her career, "I was standing upon the stage of the Empire Theatre rehearsing a play for a matinee only, in which I was to appear in a heavy emotional passionate part, something that was considered out of my line, and which I intended to play to prove to my audiences and to the press that I was capable of playing something besides a part that was known as an 'Annie Russell part.'

"It was the last rehearsal, and I was very much excited over it; and during the rehearsal I received a cable from my manager, Charles Frohman, saying: 'Will you come to London and play "Dangerfield?" Reply quick. I knew that when Mr. Frohman wanted a quick reply that he wanted it, and the thought came over me, 'suppose that I fail at my matinee here to-morrow and go to London and they do not like me there, what will be the effect on my future work?'

"I called the boy and answered, 'Will sail Saturday.' I played my matinee, as you know, with success and two days after I was on the steamer, and eight days after Mr. Frohman was explaining to me the difficulties of my position in London in appearing in a one-act play. He told me all this and said:

"'If you succeed, they will want to see you in a full evening's play, and we will produce "Sue," and here is the cast. If you do not succeed tear this up, take a trip to Paris and go home.'

"You see it is not torn up, and it never will be if I can help it.

"Then I began to realize my position. I was in a terrible state. I went to the theatre, where I met a number of actors. They in all kindness expressed their sympathy for me because I had to appear in a one-act play. I wandered about London. I made up my mind to go to the theatre to laugh and throw off the mean feeling I had. I went to the Garrick, where I was to play and where Mr. William Gillette was keeping a crowded house roaring, but I could not laugh. I was thinking of my very slim chances of making an impression on the London public.

"I was to appear in a curtain raiser, and as the curtain raiser in London is simply a sop thrown to the gallery and pit to keep them quiet while the fashionable portion of the audience is getting ready to come to the theatre—and they never come before nine—I felt that all the hopes I had ever cherished of making a London success were about to be dashed. I tried to enjoy Mr. Gillette's play, but I could not muster together spirits enough to rouse a laugh, and I sat through the piece stupidly overcome by my own disagreeable thoughts and wondering what this same audience would think of me.

"I got no consolation from their enjoyment of Mr. Gillette, for Mrs. Gillette, I argued, had been tried and found all right, while I, an unknown artistic quantity to these same judges was still untried and might not find the same favor with them.

"And if I do succeed in pleasing those who see me in 'Dangerfield '95,' I said, what good will it do me, as the real audience wont be there to see it? Most of them will still be at dinner as the curtain is going up for my performance, and I will be in my dressing room getting ready to go home when they are coming in. It certainly looked like a forlorn hope, but I determined to do my best, and so with all sorts of fears and misgivings, but with the intention of winning, if possible, I approached the ordeal.

"Well, with all these impressions woven deep into my mind, and with fear that there was very little hope for me after all, I faced my first English audience. I was all a-tremble. I looked over the footlights. There was the same audience, apparently, that I had sat in and was frightened by on my first visit to the theatre. It did not know me, and I wondered what it was thinking about. There was a little clapping of hands from some Americans in the audience, but that was the only thing to cheer me.

"I heard one woman say: 'Isn't she sweet?' and with my heart fluttering and my head in a whirl of bewilderment I began to play. The result you know. I pleased that first audience, and from that time on the London public was a kind, sympathising and encouraging friend, and came early to the theatre.

"The critics liked me so well in 'Dangerfield '95' that, as Mr. Frohman had predicted, they insisted upon seeing me in a more substantial play, and Mr. Frohman immediately arranged for my appearance in 'Sue.' At the rehearsals of 'Sue' I had the good fortune to meet Mr. Bret Harte, the author of the story, and co-author with Mr. T. Edgar Pemberton of the comedy. He is a round, florid and a most good-natured gentleman, looking more like an English capitalist than a poet, and bearing no resemblance to the first prints of him that appeared with his earliest successes. His hair is white, his complexion ruddy and his clothes elegant, with no suggestion of the fop or dandy.

"The first night of 'Sue' was entirely unlike the first night of 'Dangerfield.' All literary and artistic London was there, and I was received warmly—not with a few clapping hands, as I had been on the other first night. Again the London public was pleased with my work and the critics paid me nice compliments. When you reach them—that is, touch their hearts or play on their lighter emotions—you hold them closely captive, and they are swept along as if part and parcel of the story that is unfolding."

Miss Russell, who off the stage has none of the gushing, egotistic ways of the average actress, modestly stopped short here in her recital of that night of triumph in 'Sue.' She showed letters, however, from prominent actors and actresses in London which were full of enthusiastic commendation. Here is one she received from Sydney Grundy, the dramatist:

"Winter Lodge, Addison road, W.,
"10 June, 1898.

"Dear Miss Russell (if I may call you so): Permit me just a line to thank you for the pleasure your performance this afternoon afforded me and all my neighbors in the stalls, including Mr. and Mrs. Kendal and Mr. and Mrs. John Hare. Your acting was simple, natural, reposeful and altogether delightful. I should not presume to tell you so, except that you played my Margery in 'The New Woman,' and authors, you know, are privileged. That piece was no good in America, but your performance must have been exquisite. Your namesake, Lillian Russell—a very old friend of mine—told me that you would be charming in it before you played it, and I am quite sure that she was right. Sincerely yours,

"SYDNEY GRUNDY.

"P. S. All round, I thought the acting admirable. You are getting on in the States. You could not have done it ten years ago."

One would not think that John Burns, the labor agitator, who fills a seat in the British Parliament, gave much time or attention to things theatrical, but here is a letter Miss Russell, who did not know, and has never seen him, received, after her success in "Sue."

"Dear Miss Russell:

"I am a busy man, but was able to-day to snatch sufficient time to see you and your friends act in 'Sue' this afternoon. I write to thank you and heartily congratulate you on the admirable interpretation of the chief character. The whole play was excellent and your position in it was sustained with such power, feeling and ability as to command my sincere appreciation. You gave delight to many to-day; to myself the keenest enjoyment, and interest in the future of your career as an actress, which I trust may be as successful as your work to-day deserves. Yours faithfully,

"JOHN BURNS."

Charles Frohman supplied some of the missing information about the first "Sue" night. He said that Beerbohm Tree paid her the tribute of saying that she spoke as exquisite English as he had ever heard. After that came Mrs. Grau, wife of the impresario, with a delegation of artistes from the Comedie Francaise Company, who declared that Miss Russell's French was perfect and of the purest quality. Apropos of this it may be stated that Mr. Frohman has arranged for Miss Russell to appear in a one act French play at the American Theatre, Paris, during the exhibition—1900.

During one of the "Sue" rehearsals, the manager said, Miss Ellen Terry came in, saying, "I want to see my Elaine."

Anthony Hope, the author, was one of Miss Russell's callers at the Garrick. He congratulated her upon her success and said: "I want you to play one of my heroines in the States."

"The last night of 'Sue,'" said the gentle little actress, "was even a greater surprise than the first. It was a magnificent audience and just brimming over with enthusiasm. I was called out six times at the close of the performance, and after I had appeared with the entire company they called for me again. The audience demanded a speech. I nearly collapsed. I had never made a speech and never heard a woman speak under such circumstances, but I walked out and did my best. I started in by saying I had never made a speech in my life, when a woman in the audience remarked audibly, 'Oh, the dear!' Then I went on thanking everybody until I came to a point where I could not think of more to say and, with my speech unfinished, I ran off the stage.

"Yes; I shall appear in Henri Lavedan's 'Catherine' this Fall, and other plays. Until then I shall rest and study the soul of this sweet and beautiful character. The play is delightful. I had read and reread it, and being familiar with the methods of the Comedie Francaise, I can fancy I see the company enacting its story. I like Catherine better than any character I have been called upon to portray, and I think the American theatre-goers will like it. It is a marvellous study of a girl's heart, and as pretty a love story as was ever written.

"Although the part is not what is termed a star part, the play gives equal opportunities to the entire cast, and I am so glad that Mr. and Mrs. Le Moyne are also to play in the piece."

THE "ARABIAN NIGHTS" CONQUEST OF THE SOUDAN.

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subsequently sought out Zubeir secretly, and announced that he had had a dream in which it had been revealed to him that he (Zubeir) was the long-expected Mahdi, and that he (Abdullahi) was to be his Khalifa. "I told him," relates Zubeir, "that I was not the Mahdi; that I had heard that he (Abdullahi), had always been considered a poor fool, and that now I was sure of it; that my mission was only to open roads which had become blocked by the wickedness of the Arabs, and so to establish trade."

Abdullahi, after this rebuff, departed. His father, before dying, urged him to take refuge with some religious sheik on the Nile, then emigrate to Mecca, and never to return to their country, evidently sharing the common opinion as to his son's intelligence.

On his journey, his wide cotton shirt, the distinguishing dress of his tribe, and his dialect marked him in the Nile Valley as a stranger, and he was frequently greeted with "What do you want? Go back to your own country; there is nothing to steal here." He was continually mocked and hooted. All his property consisted of one donkey, which had a gall on his back, and could only carry his water-skin and bag of corn. In one village the people declared this donkey had been stolen from them the previous year, and would not have allowed it to be taken away, had not a holy man interposed. Some people gave him food out of sheer pity, or he would have starved. At length he reached Messallamia, and found the Mahdi (who was then only known as Mohammed Achmed) busily engaged in building the tomb of the late Sheik el Koreishi. He then repeated the proposal he had made to Zubeir. Achmed thought it a good idea, and the bargain was struck. The people already regarded Achmed as a holy man, and Abdullahi had little difficulty in soon persuading them that he was the long-expected Mahdi.

Sush is the origin of Abdullahi who ruled for twelve years over a great African empire. He reigned amid inconceivable cruelty and debauchery. The British army found the Soudan strewn with the bleaching bones of his victims. The Soudan once had a great commerce. He plundered every village and town not occupied by his own followers. He enslaved or murdered all the inhabitants. His debauchery was insatiable and unspeakable. His followers fought for him till death, with no desire save to please him and so gain heaven.

He was not without personal attractiveness. Slatin says:

"I scrutinized him carefully; he had a light brown complexion, a sympathetic Arab face, in which the marks of small-pox were still traceable, an aquiline nose, a well-shaped mouth, slight mustache and a fringe of hair on his cheeks, but rather thicker on his chin; he was about middle height, neither thin nor stout; was wearing a jibba (the Mahdists' dress) covered with small square patches of different colors and a Mecca takia, or skull cap, round which was bound a cotton turban; he generally spoke with a smile and showed a row of glistening white teeth."

The Khalifa treated Slatin barbarously for several years. Then he relaxed his brutality and made a sort of secretary of him. Slatin was, to all appearances, a perfect Mussulman.

At last he had so much liberty allowed him that one night he rode out of Omdurman on a camel. The British officers at Assuan, then the most advanced British outpost in the Soudan, were greatly surprised one morning in March, 1895, to see Slatin return to them as from the grave.

In 1896 the British Government announced that an Anglo-Egyptian force would occupy the Soudan as far as Dongola on the Nile. It is this force which has now gone to Khartoum.

General Kitchener organized a splendid army. He depended more upon the excellence of the equipment than upon the size of his army, which consisted of about 15,000 infantry, 900 cavalry, and 1,000 fighting men in the camel corps. There were also several thousand Arab allies, good fighters and finely armed. About 2,000 more men were in the transport service. All the important officers were young Britons who had served in the Egyptian army, for which they were carefully selected. The whole force was composed of picked men. Three-fourths of the force were fellahin belonging to corps that had proved steady under fire and were admirably trained. The rest were black Soudanese battalions, more active, eager and self-reliant in battle and better marksmen than the Egyptians, but less intelligent and amenable to discipline and direction.

The artillery consisted of powerful Krupp field batteries and Maxim batteries. The advance from Wady Halfa began on March 19, 1896, and on the following day Major Collinson occupied Akasheh without opposition. The Khalifa proclaimed a jehad or holy war against Egypt, and called upon all dervishes capable of bearing arms to enroll themselves under the green banner. The Emir Osman Azark advanced with reinforcements to Suarda. The vanguard of the Egyptian expedition consisted of 1,200 men, including a camel corps of 500. The main force numbered 8,500 infantry and 630 cavalry, commanded by 120 British officers, with a Maxim battery, served by English artillerists. Of the infantry 4,000 were Soudanese.

English troops were dispatched at once to Egypt. Three British battalions and 7,000 Bedouins were organized there to join the expedition, bringing its strength up to 19,000 men. Native troops of India went to Suakin to relieve the Egyptian garrison there and enable it to take part in the operations in the field.

A fort and intrenched camp were built at Akasheh, beyond which point a halt was made until transport camels and boats could be obtained. In the Suakin district the forces of Osman Digna moved toward Sinkat and fighting took place between the Dervishes and friendly Hadendowas and Amarar, who barred their advance. An Egyptian force went out from Suakin on April 15 to support the friendly Arabs and routed Osman Digna completely. On the Nile the campaign was opened on May 1 by Major Burn-Murdoch, who, with his cavalry, dispersed a force of Dervishes in the vicinity of Akasheh.

Many sheiks of the Bisharin, Ababdeh and Kababish tribes, who had formerly adhered to the Khalifa, were won over by the British, who organized a large body of British irregulars to patrol the desert on both sides of the Nile, arming them with Remingtons, while the Egyptians carried Martini-Henry rifles.

Contention and division, jealous fear and distrust paralyzed the central power at Omdurman. The mulazamin of the Khalifa attacked the bodyguard of Ali Wad Helu, and in the fight several hundred men were slain on both sides before peace was restored by the Emirs.

On June 6, after all the expeditionary force had been brought up to Akasheh, the troops were led out by the Sirdar to attack the Dervishes intrenched at Ferkeh, sixteen miles distant. The main body, 7,000 strong, with rifled artillery and machine guns, advanced along the river, while the camel corps and cavalry, with horse artillery and two Maxims, 2,100 men in all, took the desert route to occupy the heights east of Ferkeh. The intention was to surprise and entrap the fifty-seven Emirs there, who had only 3,000 troops with about 1,000 rifles. The black troops advanced rapidly to the attack at dawn on June 7, opening a well-directed fire. The Dervishes fought with desperate valor, but were steadily driven from their positions, being unable to resist the double attack, from the front and from the side of the desert. The desert column, which had successfully turned the position to cut off the retreat, fell upon the retreating Dervishes after they were driven out of the town, pursuing them beyond Suarda, and capturing the camp there, with a great quantity of supplies.

At Ferkeh all their camels, provisions and ammunition fell into the hands of the Egyptians. The Dervishes, who were some of the Khalifa's picked troops, led by his best Emirs, did their best to resist the attack. The Baggaras among them refused to surrender when death was the certain alternative.

The Jaalin, a religious people, who were once faithful Mahdists, but now detest the Khalifa's regime, and the blacks who fought for the Khalifa under constraint and afterward were eager to join the Egyptian army, constituted the bulk of the prisoners. Nearly 900 were killed in camp, including fifty Emirs. The brave commander, Hamuuda, was one of the slain.

The Egyptian troops were composed of the most stalwart men of the nation, finer in physique than any army in Europe, better fed and cared for than most European soldiers. About 500 prisoners were taken by the Egyptians, whose total loss was only twenty killed and eighty wounded. The pursuit and the taking of Suarda brought the enemy's losses up to 2,000 killed, wounded and prisoners. The Egyptian camp was established at Kosheh, close to Ferkeh.

The Khalifa, after the Ferkeh defeat, preached a holy war, and said he would send large reinforcements of 7,000 brave men to Dongola, but, surrounded by the disaffected, he dared not send many of his own tribe north. He sought support from the Nile population, whom the Baggaras had hitherto kept in cruel subjection, releasing the imprisoned Dongolese and Jaalin chiefs, and giving them commands. The Dervish garrison retired from the country before Suarda and Dongola, whence thousands flocked to the Egyptian camp, delighted with the prospect of a change of rulers.

Wad El Bishara, Emir of Dongola, ordered a muster of all the males in the province capable of bearing arms. Determined as he was to defend his post to the last extremity, he collected a great quantity of grain, forcing the people to give it up as a contribution to the Jehad. In July the cholera, which had broken out in a virulent form in Lower Egypt, causing 90 per cent of deaths among the persons seized at Cairo, attacked the British soldiers in camp at Wady Halfa and the Egyptians at Kosheh, where there was a fatality of over 70 per cent. The epidemic ceased after raging about a month.

By the end of July the railway was completed as far as Ferkeh. The advance on Dongola was delayed until the Nile should rise sufficiently to enable the stern-wheel steamers to ascend the second cataract, and the new gunboats, armed with twelve-pounders and six-pounders, to be put together. The Khalifa and the Mahdists took courage, believing that God was fighting on their side, while they saw the Egyptians delayed, while cholera decimated their numbers, and storms destroyed a large section of their railroad. The Baggaras, in exacting contributions for the war, and punishing the people suspected of holding communication with the enemy, began to treat the Nile populations more cruelly than ever before.

A forward movement of the Egyptian forces began on August 25, with the occupation of Absarat by the Suarda garrison. The railroad was continued to this point, and the troops advanced to Fereig. The Staffordshire Regiment, which joined the forces from England, was transported on the large river gunboats, which were able to steam fourteen miles an hour, and carried each a twelve-pounder Maxim forward, mounted in an armored citadel, a lighter Maxim amidships, two quick-firing six-pounder guns and six or eight machine guns in a lofty tower, and capable of sweeping the river banks and fitted with an electric searchlight.

In September General Kitchener conquered the city and province of Dongola. All the Baggara Dervishes fought in battle until they were killed. That completed the campaign for that year.

It was resumed in 1897 with an unbroken record of success. The campaign is only carried on when the Nile is high.

The first great event of this year's campaign was the battle of the Atbara River, where 60,000 Dervishes were defeated. The great Emir Mahmoud was taken prisoner.

Kitchener's army then advanced to Omdurman and Khartoum. The Khalifa bravely came out of his city with his sacred green banner and attacked the British. He was repulsed with fearful loss. It was certainly over 10,000. General Kitchener estimates the enemy's army at 40,000 men.

The Baggaras, the Khalifa's tribe, never faltered an instant in the fight. They would have died to the last man, had not the Khalifa called off 8,000 of them to act as a bodyguard to him in his flight.

That is practically the end of Mahdism.